

DAVID BERNARD HARFORD 1886 to 1917¹

Last Update 13 October 2012

The journey in the spring cart took David and Laura four months to reach Albany. On arrival in Albany in October 1886 their first child David Bernard was born in the cart at the foot of Albany's main street, York Street. Years later when submitting a document to the Canberra War Museum with information on her son David who was killed in WW1, Laura wrote this information as a post script.

Particulars Required for the Roll of Honour of Australia in the Memorial War Museum.

1. Name (in full) of Fallen Soldier *David Bernard Harford.*
2. Unit and Number (if known) *51st Battalion No. 38421. private.*
3. With what Town or District in Australia was he chiefly connected (under which his name ought to come on the Memorial) —
Town (if any) *Ravensthorpe, Phillips River Western Aust*
4. What was his Birthplace *Albany W.A.*
5. Date of Death *March 31st 1914.*
6. Place where Killed or Wounded *at 5th Australian field ambulance France*
Buried at Poperes.

Particulars Required for the Nation's Histories

1. What was his Calling *Miner and other Labour.*
2. Age at time of Death *30 years & 5 months.*
3. What was his School *Public School. Day Dawn. W.A.*
4. What was his other Training
5. If born in Britain or Abroad, at what age did he come to Australia *Born in Australia.*
6. Had he ever served in any Military or Naval Force before Enlisting in the A.I.F. (Please state particulars)
won several prizes in Rifle club shooting.
7. Any other biographical details likely to be of interest to the Historian of the A.I.F. or of his Regiment —
he was born in a spring cart at Albany after doing a journey of 14 hundred miles.
8. Was he connected with any other Member of the A.I.F. who died or who distinguished himself. (Please state Relationship) —
9. Name and Address of the Parent or other person giving this information —
Name *Susan Anna Harford.*
Relationship to Soldier *Mother.*
Address *Berri, River Murray South Australia*
10. Names and Addresses of any other persons to whom reference could be made by the Historian for further information —
Name *William Simpson.*
Address *Phillips River Goldfields, Randell, W. Aust*

NOTE.—This Folder is Addressed to the Secretary, Department of Defence, Melbourne. Please fold in four, and stick down gummed flap so that the addressed portion is outside. The information is required urgently.

Archdiocese of Perth (Western Australia)

Certificate of Baptism

ALB 2/16

PARISH OF *Albany*

This is to Certify that *David Bernard Harford*
child of *David Harford* and *Sara Harford*
nee *Brendon* born on *28-10-1886*
was baptised in the parish on *24-11-1886* by Rev *F. Matéu*
Sponsors *Josephine Carratt*
Date *11 April 2008* Signed *St Frances Hill*
Archivist

Annotations

¹ Initial Draft by Marion Argus, Albany W.A.

In 1910 David Jr. was 24 years old and earning a living fishing at Hopetoun. He had chosen to stay in Western Australia with his sister Vida after the rest of the family left Kundip to return to South Australia.

Vida's daughters fondly remember the dark handsome "*Uncle Davy*" who once bought Vida's little girls a tea set, a prized possession, and one of the very few toys they ever owned.

David was one of the first to join the newly established Rifle Club in Ravensthorpe where he became a top rifle shot. He was later to put this talent to use for by the year 1914 we were at war with Germany and he was to fight against the very race of people from whom he was descended. His maternal grandfather Carl Weis (Charles Wise) was born in Germany.



David Bernard Harford
Private 3844, 51st Battalion Australian Infantry

David enlisted at Ravensthorpe on 14 July 1915. Prior to this he had taken the oath of allegiance and passed the Medical Examination on 28 June. He was 28 years and 9 months and he gave his occupation as a Miner. His mother was given as next of kin and she was living at Berri, South Australia, at the time. He was described as being 5 feet 5 Inches tall, chest of 33 Inches, complexion dark, eyes brown and hair black. He had "*absolutely no distinguishing marks.*"

David kept a diary starting from the day he sailed from Fremantle. It was a very moving experience to sit in the War Memorial in Canberra and read the handwritten copy his mother had made. The location of the original is unknown.

Two books have been published with extracts of David's Diary featuring in them. One is by Suzanne Welborn, titled "Bush Heroes" and the other is "The Blue and White Diamond" by Neville Browning. So many of these young men came from the countryside and were excellent soldier material.

David was appointed to the 9th Reinforcements, 28th Battalion, AIF, which was a training battalion. Their training was done at Blackboy Hill Camp near Perth.



DAVID HARFORD (SEATED RIGHT) AT THE BLACKBOY HILL CAMP AT PERTH

David sailed for England on the *Miltiades* on 13 February 1916. The young Aussies had an irreverence for their officers, especially if they were English, and this often landed them in trouble. According to the officers they were untidy and unkempt. However, when the time came for battle they displayed enormous strength of character and bravery.

The ship reached Ceylon on 23 February and Suez in Egypt on 8 March. They disembarked and carried out training and other work. David was able to visit the pyramids. In early April his unit was transferred to the 51st Battalion and on 13 May part of the battalion was transferred to Tel-el-Kabir some 50 miles towards Cairo.

On 5 June the battalion took a train to Alexandria where the men boarded the liner *Fransconia* and sailed for England with an escort of two destroyers. They arrived at Plymouth on 15 June and went by train to a Amesbury, Wiltshire on the Salisbury Plains. They then marched 10 miles to the British Army training camp at Rollestone. From there David was able to visit Stonehenge but he would not have known how very close he was to the village of Heytesbury where Samuel Harford was born and raised. It was only about 10 miles away from his camp.

On 22 July the unit left by train for London and Folkstone. Later that day they sailed for France and disembarked at Bologne. The next day they took a train to their base at Etaples about 18 miles away. They undertook further training including preparation for gas warfare. While expecting to go fairly quickly to the trenches David found on 10 August he had the Mumps and was sent to the 24th General Hospital where he and others were isolated.

David was discharged on 1 September and found his “mates” had gone to the front line and he had to repeat some of the training that he had already done. He finally headed for the front on 24 September 1916 and rejoined his unit at “*Aglinsjarot Village*.” David did not expect to go to the lines for another 2 weeks. Apparently he became a bit bored with the delays in seeing action and his Service Record shows the following entry:

“CRIME:- When on active service disobedience of a Routine Order in that he was in the town of Reninghelst at 9-10 pm without a pass or written leave from his C.O. on 28.9.16. AWARD:- 72 hours F.P. (Field Prison) No.2”

His diary says: *Sentenced to three days imprisonment in drill punishment compound for being caught out after tatts*. He didn't see it as a big issue!

David finally went into “*the firing line*” on 6 October. Because he was such a good rifle shot he was picked as the Company sniper. At this time they were on the Ypres front. The troops were rotated between three positions:

- labouring work some distance from the lines. For example bringing up timber for the construction of the trenches.
- support for troops in the firing line, located closer to the trenches where they could be quickly moved into position if needed. They also moved into trenches to help repair them after heavy bombardments. Being so close to the front there was always a chance of being fired on.
- In the trenches where they were subject to almost constant fire and bombardment. Because of this the period of time spent in the trenches was relatively short.

Also, the troops were periodically removed quite some distance from the front for a complete relaxing break. In this way the pressure on the men was greatly reduced.

David's first period in the trenches lasted about 10 days before the company was moved out to the reserve position. He was then sent to a sniper school at “*Mont des Bats*” where he passed his test on 31 October. He spent a couple of days in Abbeville before returning to his unit.

On 7 November they commenced a long march to the Somme. This was at a time when the Somme Offensive was drawing to a close. The offensive took place between 1 July and 18 November 1916 on both banks of the Somme River.

The plan for the offensive evolved out of Allied strategic discussions at Chantilly, Oise in December 1915. Allied representatives agreed on a concerted offensive in 1916 by the French, British, Italian and Russian armies. The Somme offensive was to be the Anglo-French contribution to this general offensive, and was intended to create a rupture in the German line which could then be exploited with a decisive blow.

The opening day of the battle on 1 July 1916 saw the British Army suffer the worst one-day combat losses in its history, with nearly 60,000 casualties. British senior officers were criticised for incurring very

severe losses while failing to achieve their territorial objectives. At the end of the battle, British and French forces had penetrated a total of 6 miles (9.7 km) into German occupied territory. The British Army was three miles from Bapaume and did not capture any French towns. The Germans were still occupying partially entrenched positions and were not as demoralised as the British High Command had anticipated.

It was one of the largest battles of the First World War and by the time fighting had petered out in late autumn 1916 the forces involved had suffered more than 1.5 million casualties, making it one of the bloodiest military operations ever recorded².

David's unit arrived at the demolished village of Longueval on 15 November. They were kept in reserve for two weeks moving to support on 30 November and into the trenches on 1 December. They moved out on 22 December and were taken by train 34 miles to Vignacourt where they spent Christmas.

During January and most of February 1917 most of their time was spent labouring at Longueval, four miles from the front, except for eight days in the firing line. On 25 March, David made his last diary entry at a field hospital where he had been sent with "*trench feet*" developed from the wet muddy trenches. The hospital was located in an area that was being shelled.

David was injured and died of his wounds at the 5th Australian Field Ambulance on the 31 March 1917. The nature of his wounds was not stated in his Service Record. His death is referred to in the history of the 51st Battalion³:

For King and Cobbers

Long range shelling was prevalent in the area and casualties since March 27th were two men killed and sixteen wounded, of whom Lance Corporal S.V. Ray and Privates A.G. Cowie, D.B. Harford, T Linton, A Little and H.A. Williams subsequently died of wounds. Lance Corporal A.T. Armstrong¹ was severely wounded in both legs and evacuated to England, until he was repatriated back to Australia on September 10th.

David's death was on the same day as his sister Olivia's birthday it affected his dear mother greatly. Olivia says her mother rejected her from that time on. She was only 14 years old. We are so fortunate to have David's diary. It is a real treasure and a rare documentation of the feelings and experiences of an ordinary Australian soldier.

We are very proud of a young man who accepted his fate with such bravery and grace and who now lies in a lonely grave in Pozieres British Cemetery, France. This cemetery is located on the Albert to Bapaume Road half a mile south west of Pozieres and three and a half miles north east of Albert. He is located in Plot II (2) Row E Grave 4.⁴ The following photos taken on our visit in September 2012 show the grave and its location:

² Wikipedia.com

³ For King and Cobbers, A History of the 51st Battalion, A.I.F., Neville Browning

⁴ Letter to David's mother 16 December 1924



David Bernard's Headstone

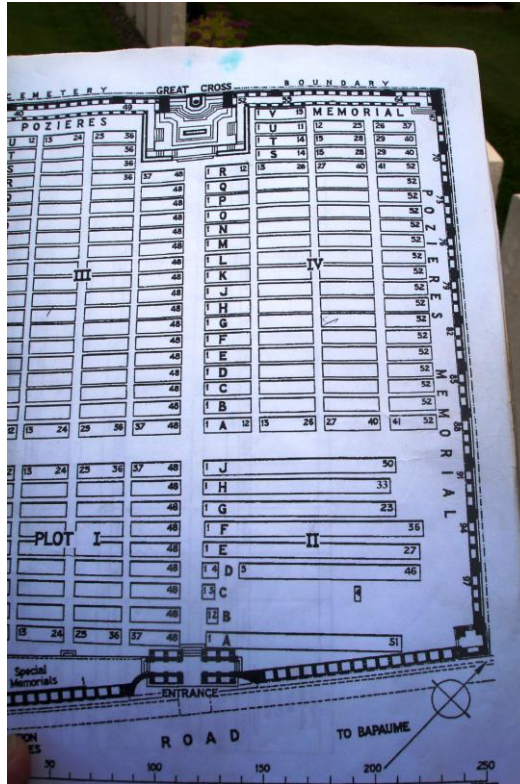
David's Headstone is simple and standard for the graves in the cemetery. The words at the base are difficult to read but when magnified are:

*"He bore his cross
He wears a crown
Sometime you'll understand"*

Some 95 years have passed since David's untimely death. I am not sure us or the world is much closer to understanding!



Location of grave. Right hand side Row E, fourth grave from centre.



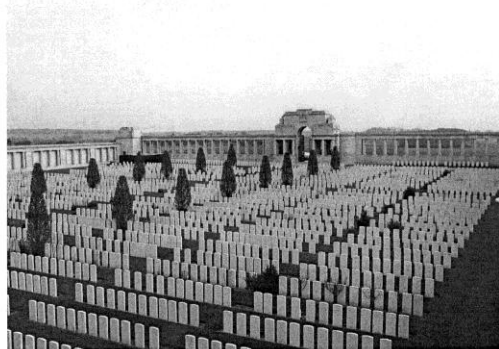
Pozieres Cemetery Map

**In Memory of
Private DAVID BERNARD HARFORD**

**3844, 51st Bn., Australian Infantry, A.I.F.
who died age 30
on 31 March 1917**

**Son of David and Susan Ann Harford, of Berri, South Australia.
Native of Western Australia.**

**Remembered with honour
POZIERES BRITISH CEMETERY, OVILLERS-LA BOISSELLE**



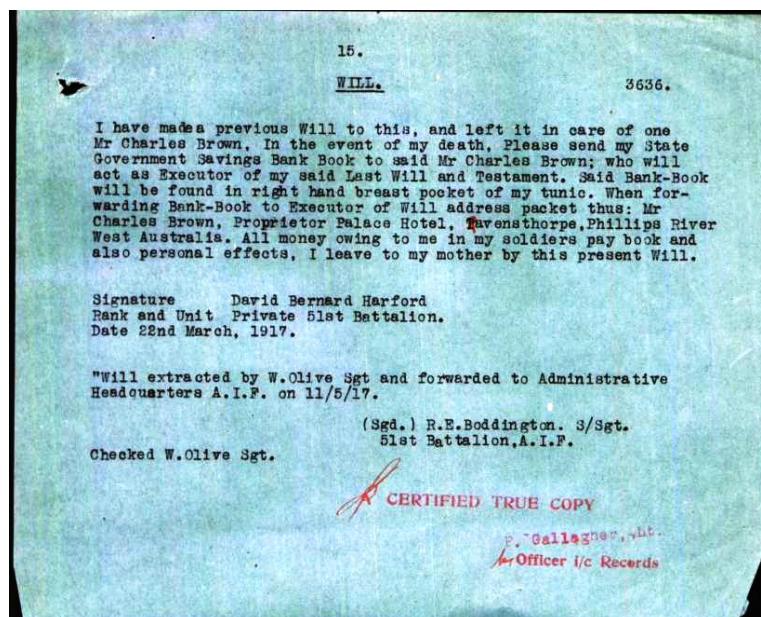
**Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission**

The family has several lovely postcards written in his very neat hand to his Dear Sister Vida and her little girls sent from France and "somewhere in Belgium".



David's effects were returned to his mother. They were listed as: Pipe in case, knife, wallet, metal wristlet watch and strap, 2 note books (no doubt containing his diary), Jug purse, metal mirror, and a sixpenny piece.⁵ His mother also received his medals.

The Service Record contains a copy of David's simple Will. Probate was granted November 1917, with his Executor Charles Farbar Brown of Ravensthorpe. The value of his estate was 64 Pounds.



David's Will Dated 22 March 1917

⁵ Service Record



A.I.F Memorial Blackboy Hill